



The Right Reverend Terry Allen White, Bishop

## **Safe at Worship in the Episcopal Diocese of Kentucky** **Effective July 1, 2020 Version**

### **PRINCIPLES.**

- A. **The health and safety of all people is of utmost importance.** Therefore, until further notice, the Bishop grants a dispensation from the promise regularly renewed by all baptized people, “Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers” as it refers specifically to the Breaking of the Bread, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and reception of Holy Communion. Anyone who is sick or living with someone who is sick should stay home, as should anyone who feels vulnerable or is at risk for other reasons. The CDC says those 65 and older, and those of any age with underlying medical conditions, are at high risk to develop severe illness from COVID-19. Please refer to the [CDC’s resource page describing who is at high risk.](#)
- B. **The safest form of worship is that in which one participates virtually.** This form of worship fulfills the above-mentioned promise in the Baptismal Covenant. Provision is to be made in all congregations for virtual worship each Sunday. This option may include partnering with another congregation to join their online liturgy.
- C. **No congregation is required to begin gathering in person before they feel safe.** Congregations are free to adopt stricter protocols than directed below. Beginning on July 1, parishes that are ready to open safely may once again have in-person worship – so long as social distancing guidelines below and related restrictions on the number of people that can be present – are in place. [Any congregation not yet ready to have in-person worship is not required to gather.](#)
- D. **Outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings.** Parishes may hold outdoor liturgies on their lawn or in the parking lot. Social distancing also applies to these events. There needs to be space so that chairs or cars of participants from different households are six feet apart. For liturgies outdoors, participants should be instructed to bring their own chairs. For drive-in services, attendees should be instructed not to leave their cars.
- E. **Regular testing helps prevent the spread of COVID-19.** Clergy and other congregational leaders should be tested regularly to prevent a-/pre-symptomatic spreading of COVID-19.

## **Social Distancing and Other Requirements for Liturgical Events in the Time of COVID 19:**

Communicate often through all available means to all parishioners about the plan to resume in-person liturgies and the following Directives, as well as your specific site plan. Share your site plan ahead of time through every possible means, and frame this plan as a covenant parishioners make with each other, to respect the dignity of everyone and to love our neighbors as ourselves. These plans will only work so long as all follow them. Signage will be helpful to remind everyone about good practices such as hand washing, the availability of hand-sanitizer, etc.

### **DIRECTIVES. To be followed without exception, until further notice.**

1. Social distancing is required at all times. Mark or arrange seating to allow at least six feet between parishioners, in all directions, with an exception made for members of the same household:
  - 1.1. Limit the available seating in your church to allow for social distancing, removing seating when possible. Maximum allowable capacity is set according to the Governor's guidelines for Houses of Worship (currently no more than 50%). Once the seating capacity is determined, the maximum capacity indoors may not be exceeded.
  - 1.2. Inform parishioners of these limitations and indicate that seating will be first come, first served, or whether parishioners are required to indicate attendance ahead of time by some method.
2. Names and contact information of all who attend any in-person service or other event must be maintained. Our congregations are committed to the public health of all, and in the event that someone who attends a liturgy or other event tests positive for the coronavirus, all people who attended the same event will be contacted by public health officials.
3. Hand sanitizer will be placed at all church building entrances that are in use, and throughout the chancel and sanctuary as needed.
4. Remove all prayer books, hymnals, Bibles, envelopes and printed materials from pews, tract racks, at doors, etc. Encourage worshippers to bring their prayer book from home, or download to a personal device or print out their own order of service at home. *One-time use bulletins may be offered, but are strongly discouraged.*
5. Everyone who attends and/or participates in in-person worship or other gatherings must wear face coverings or masks for the duration of the gathering. Lectors may remove masks while they are reading. Priests and deacons should wear masks or face coverings except when speaking during the liturgy. Masks should be made available for parishioners who do not have one. Exceptions are only for those who cannot wear a mask for medical reasons, and children under 2 years of age.
6. Everyone with a leadership role in the liturgy must have their temperature taken upon arrival. If an elevated temperature is recorded, they may not participate and should seek medical care. A non-contact thermometer or thermal imager is recommended for public use. *It is strongly recommended that all who attend in-person gatherings should have their temperature checked before entrance.*
7. At any celebration of the Holy Eucharist only priests and deacons may distribute Communion.

8. If the Holy Eucharist is celebrated, Holy Communion will be distributed by the priest or deacon going to those who are seated. Communicants are to stay in place. Communicants and priest or deacon will wear masks as the Host is carefully shared without contact. The communicant(s) wait for the priest or deacon to move at least six feet away before pulling down or removing mask to receive the Host. The Host is not to be placed on a communicant's tongue during this time. At all times, the Blessed Sacrament is to be treated reverently.
9. Distribution of the chalice is suspended.
10. Congregational singing and chanting are suspended for in-person services. The entire liturgy, whether Morning Prayer, the Liturgy of the Word alone, or the Holy Eucharist, is to be entirely spoken only. Instrumental music, as well as a soloist or ensemble of no more than four may provide music, observing social distancing and not facing each other while singing.
11. The exchange of peace is to be expressed through gestures that do not involve physical touching, and worshippers are not to leave their seats.
12. Processionals should be replaced with a more simplified entrance, requiring less movement and physical proximity.
13. Nursery care, Children's Chapel, Sunday School and Sunday classes, and Coffee Hour are suspended.
14. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily (e.g., tables, pews, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet handles) with a recommended disinfectant. Try to wipe down pews and all hard surfaces, including bathrooms, after every in-person service or event. See the CDC guidance on cleaning and disinfecting at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>.
15. Cleaning of bathrooms is essential to keeping people safe and distancing is required in those facilities.
16. When cleaning, avoid the use of products that could re-aerosolize infectious particles. This includes, but is not limited to, avoiding practices such as dry sweeping or the use of high-pressure streams of air, water, or cleaning chemicals.
17. Guidelines for Holy Baptism, based upon the guidance of health officials and Episcopal Church guidelines, will be issued at a time to be determined later.
18. No date has been set for when and how Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation will be celebrated.
19. Funerals and Weddings may be held beginning on July 1 in congregations that are ready to open safely, so long as the social distancing guidelines above and related restrictions on the number of people that can be present are in place.
20. All ordained and lay leaders are encouraged to gradually phase in in-person worship and meetings, not doing too much too soon. Learn from initial plans, adjust as needed, and regularly communicate with parishioners about protocols you have implemented.
21. As bishop, I encourage humility in the face of this virus. Its effect on the health of people committed to our care and to our wider communities is real and can be very serious, even deadly.

**Note:** These directives will be revisited at a later time. As health officials advise, any of the above directives may be changed. Only the Bishop has authority to change the Pastoral Directive. Clergy are bound by the ordination vows to follow the pastoral direction of their Bishop, and by Title IV of the Canons to follow a Pastoral Directive without exception.

**Consult trusted scientific sources for additional and updated recommendations. It is also important to be aware of the spread of the disease in your specific community and adapt to that information.**

**CDC resources for faith communities:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

**CDC description of who is at high risk:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>

**KY Covid-19 resource page:** <https://govstatus.egov.com/kycovid19>

**KY Daily Case Report:** <https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dph/covid19/COVID19DailyReport.pdf>

**KY Guidance for community & faith-based organizations:** <https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dph/covid19/guidanceforcommunityandfaithbasedorganizations%20March%2013%202020.pdf>

**Kentucky Council of Churches guidance:** <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56cb3afb055e927c42f4954/t/5ebabf22b0a443408ca5c49f/1589296933430/Healthy+At+Worship+Guidance+from+the+KCC.pdf>

**The Hymn Society's Ecumenical Consultation on Protocols for Worship, Fellowship, and Sacraments:** <https://thehymnsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Resuming-Care-filled-Worship-and-Sacramental-Life.pdf>

**Covid Exit Strategy: Tracking how we reopen safely:** <https://www.covidexitstrategy.org/>

Version 8 (06/18/20)

**Additional notes:**

**Offering:** a central, stationary alms basin should be used to minimize contact

**Outside groups meeting at church:** subject to the directive and KY state guidelines. Consider added risk, labor and cost of every gathering.

**Regular testing:** Individuals will have to assess their own exposure levels and review public health recommendations to determine how often to be tested. Results are of course only as current as your last test and subsequent possible exposure.

**Annual Audits:** we will forward questions about the audit deadline to the relevant committees for guidance

**Disagreements with leadership about when to re-gather:** While the canons give the rector control and use of the buildings and the responsibility of liturgy, we always recommend coming together with elected leadership to affirm common goals and sharing information openly so that a shared vision and plan can be developed. Reviewing a resource like **Crucial Conversations** might be helpful before having difficult conversations. The clergy person's own risk factors must be considered. Leadership should communicate clearly that participating virtually is a faithful act which embodies Jesus' central command to love your neighbor as yourself.

**Bulletins:** The bishop has revised his directive regarding bulletins. You may offer one-time use bulletins if there is not another effective alternative for leading participants through the service, but it is strongly discouraged. This recommendation is in place because of 1) the proximity of the paper to both hands and face while speaking and 2) numerous reports from dioceses and congregations that bulletins are used as fans and therefore act to spread droplets from the hands and face further than the recommended 6 ft. If used, please discourage the use of bulletins as fans, or spread people further apart. It is advisable that congregants be asked to dispose of the bulletins in one repository which can then be removed for disposal with little contact.

**Note about measuring temperature:** Michael Vollman reported that the threshold of 100.4° is useful for denying access and giving a recommendation to seek medical care.

**Crisis communication:** It is advisable to have a crisis communication plan that can be followed if someone who has been in attendance tests positive.